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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DECIPHERING THE ARMENIAN-AMERICAN DIASPORA

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PLEASE TREAT ACCORDINGLY

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Armenian-American Diaspora continues to wield considerable influence upon the foreign and domestic policies of the Government of Armenia. This influence ranges from the obvious connection of U.S.-born and/or trained GOAM officials, the influence of private and public U.S. assistance funding and the more nuanced impact of person-to-person relations between the GOAM and the Diaspora. Of the estimated 8-10 million people who consider themselves "Armenians" who live outside the Republic of Armenia, the GOAM and major Armenian cultural and advocacy organizations estimate that 1.5-2 million live in the United States. The Armenian Diaspora community in the U.S. can be classified along a number of broad categories that involve intersecting political and religious affiliations and historical considerations. The two most visible political advocacy groups in the Diaspora, the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA) and the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) dominate policy efforts but still constitute a minority of the U.S. Diaspora population. Their membership numbers notwithstanding, most policy makers view the agendas of the AAA and ANCA as representative of the Armenian-American population as a whole.

DESPITE RUSSIA TALK, U.S. INFLUENCE STILL STRONG

¶2. (SBU) While the debate continues over whose Diaspora - Russia's or the United States' - wields greater influence in Armenia, it is impossible to underestimate the impact of the Armenian-American community on the GOAM. A number of current and former high-level GOAM policymakers were born, raised or trained in the United States with long-term connections to the Diaspora community in the U.S. Current examples of this connection include Armenia's Foreign Minister, both Deputy Foreign Ministers, various Presidential Advisors including the Chief Advisor on Economic Issues, the Minister of Trade and Economic Development and a number of deputy ministers in other ministries. These policymakers understand the financial and cultural impact of Armenian-American organizations on the Republic of Armenia (officially through bilateral lobbying and unofficially through cultural exchanges, financial remittances and historical connections) and nod to it in public and private as the driving force among the various Diaspora communities.

COMPARING THE U.S., OTHER DIASPORA POPULATIONS

¶3. (SBU) Of the estimated 8-10 million people living outside the Republic of Armenia who consider themselves "Armenians," the GOAM and major Armenian cultural and advocacy organizations estimate that 1.5-2 million live in the United States. This number ranks second after the estimated 2 to 2.5 million Armenians that live most of the year in Russia or other CIS Countries. After the U.S., some of the largest Armenian Diaspora populations live in France, Lebanon, Syria, Argentina, Syria and Turkey. The GOAM distinguishes the Armenian-American community from the other Diaspora populations as the most wealthy (both overall and per capita income) and the most diverse in terms of emigration patterns. GOAM assistance figures and information from local banking sources confirm that the majority of Armenia's public and private assistance funding (including private money transfers to families or friends) comes to Armenia from the U.S. The GOAM's MFA Diaspora Relations office makes no secret of the Armenian-American community's deep organizational structure as its most important distinguishing characteristic.

DECIPHERING U.S. DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS

14. (SBU) Armenian-American groups boast that the U.S. is home to the most organized Armenian Diaspora in the world. In terms of numbers of institutions, associations, church groups and dedicated media outlets, this assertion is true. Roughly fifty Armenian-American organizations claim nationwide membership somewhere in the thousands. These organizations tend to maintain a clear leadership structure and most engage in regular grassroots activities. Naturally, most of these groups' agendas intersect and many Diasporans belong to two or more organizations while many of the 1.5 to 2 million claim no affiliation. Embassy sources from the membership departments of the AAA and the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) estimate that over fifty percent of Armenian-Americans participate in either an Armenian religious or political organization but that only twenty to thirty percent consider themselves "active in Armenian political issues."

15. (SBU) The Armenian Diaspora community in the U.S. can be grouped along seven broad categories that involve intersecting political and religious affiliations and historical considerations. While most Armenian-American organizations are anxious to promote themselves as having broad-based memberships and as unaffiliated with any single group, many within the GOAM and high-level representatives within the Diaspora share this view of the U.S. Diaspora community. (Note: As with all demographic overviews, these groupings include multiple exceptions and contradictions. While this analysis provides a useful tool for deciphering the general orientation of organizations, it should not be considered absolute. End note.)

THE AGBU, RAMKAVARS, DIOCESE

16. (SBU) Three highly visible Diasporan organizations can be broadly linked to the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), the Armenian Democratic League (ADL or "Ramkavars") and/or affiliation with the Diocese branch of the Armenian Church. The Armenian MFA and Armenian advocacy organizations based in the U.S. estimate that this grouping captures roughly 30 percent of those active in the Armenian-American community. While often less politically active than the two largest advocacy organizations in the Diaspora (the AAA and ANCA), the AGBU and its affiliated organizations exercise considerable influence upon grassroots thinking about Armenia-related issues.

17. (SBU) The AGBU is the largest worldwide charitable organization in the Armenian Diaspora and constitutes one of the three largest groups of Armenians in the United States today. While the AGBU claims a non-political agenda and concentrates its programming on educational or humanitarian pursuits worldwide, it also touts itself as the "mainstay of Armenian liberalism" among Armenian-Americans. The AGBU is the force behind the largest Armenian school program worldwide in Diaspora communities. They currently sponsor more than 24 schools in 18 countries. The AGBU played a major role in humanitarian aid to Armenia during the harsh economic conditions of 1991-1993 and continues to finance high-profile projects in Armenia including the American University of Armenia (through a continuing endowment and annual support) and the operation of the national opera and symphony hall complex in Yerevan.

18. (SBU) The membership of the second largest political party based in the Armenian-American Diaspora, the Armenian Democratic League (ADL or "Ramkavars"), has considerable connections with the AGBU. Historically, the majority of AGBU donors and board members were members of or sympathized with the Ramkavar Party to some degree. The Ramkavars represent one of the most politically conservative elements of the Armenian-American community. The ADL is still loosely associated with the Ramkavar party in the Republic of Armenia (which controlled a handful of seats in Armenia's first parliament in the early twentieth century and after independence during the administration of President Levon Ter-Petrosian. The Ramkavars still reportedly wield considerable influence upon the editorial content of the Armenian daily "Azg"). While generally less nationalistic than some of their ANCA counterparts in the U.S., the ADL's political agenda includes a major push for worldwide recognition of the events of 1915 as a "genocide." The ADL continues to advocate for USG assistance funding for Armenia through political advocacy organizations, most notably the AAA.

19. (SBU) The Knights and Daughters of Vartan, a service organization whose recent activities are based loosely upon models such as the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, is one of the most active Armenian-American fraternal associations based in the U.S. This organization claims membership in the tens of thousands and sponsors humanitarian activities in the Republic of Armenia including the renovation of schools and

health facilities in rural communities.

¶10. (SBU) Organizations affiliated with the AGBU (including the ADL and Knights/Daughters of Vartan and others) are generally characterized by their affiliation with the Diocese of the Armenian Church ("The Diocese"). The Diocese is the largest branch of the Armenian Church which recognizes the Catholicosate of All Armenians (based in Etchmiadzin, Armenia) as the apostolic authority of the Armenian Church. Diocese congregations make up the majority of Armenian religious groups in the United States. While it would be inappropriate to state that all AGBU or ADL members worship as part of a Diocese congregation, there is a tendency for these groups to align with one another on political issues. The humanitarian arm of the Diocese, the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), raises and distributes millions of dollars in humanitarian relief aid to the Republic of Armenia each year. In addition, FAR has won contracts to implement international donor community-funded projects including the ongoing USG humanitarian programs in Nagorno-Karabagh.

"INDEPENDENT" BUT CLOSE TO DIOCESE/AGBU CLUSTER: AAA

¶11. (SBU) While claiming to be totally "independent" from the other clusters within the Armenian-American community, the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA) most often aligns itself with the AGBU/Diocese cluster on political policy issues. The AAA claims to be the largest Armenian-American advocacy organization. The AAA's membership is probably the most inclusive of Diaspora organizations because it has gone to great lengths to involve both the Diocese and Prelacy religious communities. According to Embassy sources, the AAA's dues-paying membership totals approximately 3,000 in the U.S. with 7,000 to 9,000 AAA "activists" regularly volunteering on AAA grassroots advocacy efforts. These advocacy activities include the AAA's annual meetings with the U.S. Congress during which the organization lobbies for USG Assistance funding and discusses policy issues including relations with Turkey and genocide recognition. While not legally registered as a PAC, the AAA's efforts resemble those of a traditional issue-based lobbying organization but also include programmatic endeavors such as the Armenia Tree Project, the Yerevan-based NGO Center and other assistance programs. The AAA maintains offices in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and Yerevan.

MAJOR DIASPORA CLUSTER 2: DASHNAKS (ARF), ANCA, PRELACY

¶12. (SBU) The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) is a worldwide organization that reports affiliates in over 200 countries including a strong presence in the United States. The ARF is widely known by its nickname "Dashnaksutyun." The term "Dashnak" is often used to refer to members or sympathizers of the ARF. Active since 1890, the organization is the most politically oriented of the Armenian Diaspora groups around the world and has traditionally been one of the most vocal supporters of Armenian nationalism. ARF groups were active in helping establish Armenia's first republic and as a self-proclaimed "alternative, nationalistic school of thought" in Armenia and the Diaspora during the Soviet era. The ARF's Diaspora groups are linked through a direct organizational chain to the ARF "Dashnaksutyun" party that is active in the Republic of Armenia today as a member of the governing coalition. This link notwithstanding, the majority of the ARF's funding and influence has almost always resided within the Diaspora. While Diaspora-based groups go to great lengths to defer to the ARF's Yerevan offices on worldwide policy matters, it is clear that ARF affiliates in the U.S., Canada, France and Russia have a majority voice in many issues regarding policies on issues such as relations with Turkey and Nagorno-Karabakh.

¶13. (SBU) The ARF's U.S.-based political advocacy arm is the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA). ANCA is the principal political spokesperson for ARF policies in the United States. ANCA's grassroots activities regarding April 24 commemoration addresses, U.S. policy vis-a-vis Turkey, and advocacy of independent status for Nagorno-Karabakh are some of its most visible policy campaigns both within the Armenian-American community and to outside observers. In addition to more than 100 locally based chapters, ANCA manages regional (East and West Coast) offices and a national headquarters in Washington, D.C. ANCA's strong links with the ARF headquarters in Yerevan have up until now obviated the need for an independent office in Armenia.

¶14. (SBU) Together with its vocal grassroots campaigns on political issues, the ARF has created one of the most successful networks of cultural and youth organizations among Armenian-Americans. The Armenian Relief Society (ARS)

is a nationwide women's auxiliary association that serves as the ARF's charitable and educational arm. The Armenian Youth Federation (AYF) coordinates summer camps and political education programs for young Armenian-Americans in conjunction with worldwide ARF programs.

¶15. (SBU) For decades, an unofficial link existed between the ARF and the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church ("The Prelacy"). The Prelacy recognizes the authority of the Armenian Catholicos based in Antelias, Lebanon (often referred to as the Cilician See). The ARF-Prelacy alignment coincided with the outbreak of the Cold War. With Diocese leaders based in Soviet Armenia, nationalistic ARF activists opted to operate through Prelacy congregations in the United States which they felt were less susceptible to Soviet influences and could best advance their cause for an independent Armenia. Prelacy congregations are by no means exclusively populated by ARF supporters. The perception exists among many, however, that "Dashnaks worship with the Prelacy." While there are fewer adherents of Prelacy congregations than Diocese congregations in the United States, this group remains a significant and active part of the Armenian-American religious community. (Note: There are no liturgical or theological differences between the two branches of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Relations are cordial if not warm. The current Catholicos' predecessor had been the Catholicos in Antelias before his election in Etchmiadzin, and representatives of Antelias participate in the election of a new Catholicos in Etchmiadzin. End note.)

MAKING SENSE OF THE AAA/ANCA "DIVIDE"

¶16. (SBU) The AAA and ANCA are two of the most visible Armenian-American political advocacy organizations in the United States. Both organizations maintain Washington, D.C. offices and regional hubs in major U.S. cities. While their platforms are not diametrically opposed to one another, their different approaches on key topics such as relations with Turkey and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at times give the impression to observers both in and outside the Armenian-American community that they are competitors. While the two organizations often pool their resources for joint projects (including April 24 commemoration initiatives on the Hill, lobbying efforts aimed to increase USG assistance funds destined for Armenia et al.), the highest levels of their respective membership rosters rarely overlap. ANCA's grassroots strategy often appears to the public as more aggressive and politically charged than the AAA's. Professional representatives from two groups regularly hold informal consultations on key issues, but high-ranking representatives agree that significant rifts about where to invest political and human capital are commonplace. (Note: While the AAA might at times be critical of ANCA's methodology, it appears that AAA often benefits from the increased awareness or heightened visibility that ANCA's activities offer the Armenian-American community. End note.)

CLUSTER 3 - ORGANIZATIONS CLOSE TO THE "HNCHAKS"

¶17. (SBU) Activities of the smallest, and yet of the most well-known politically based groups of Armenian-American organizations centers around the ideology of the Armenian Social Democratic Hnchakian (or Hnchak) Party. Known as "Hnchaks," members of these organizations claim to be part of the oldest Armenian Diasporan political organization in the world. Founded in 1887, the Hnchak Party originally called for an independent, democratic Armenia encompassing the historical Armenian territory. The organization flourished among Diaspora communities in the Middle East and Europe and established a strong presence on the West Coast of the United States. The party and its affiliate organizations in the U.S. (fraternal societies, a women's advocacy group and various youth groups) played an historically conservative role among Armenian-American groups during the second half of the twentieth century. Following the Armenian independence movement of the late 1980s, the Hnchak Party re-established itself in Armenia, winning seats in Parliament and carving out a small role in domestic politics. Hnchak organizations in the United States claimed to wield considerable influence on GOAM policies during this period.

¶18. (SBU) Disputes among party leadership and two subsequent splits in the party during the late 1990s weakened the party's standing in Armenia and consequently the influence of Hnchak-related groups in the U.S. Hnchak party leaders tell the Embassy that the party's aging membership in the United States, coupled with the recent internal disputes, have seriously weakened their influence as an arm of the Armenian-American lobby. The memory of the Hnchak's historically large membership and the roster of influential Hnchaks in recent Armenian-American history, however,

continue to lend the group a certain degree of clout within the Armenian-American community. Hnchak organizations support the weekly "Massis" newspaper which claims the second-largest circulation among Armenian-American publications and posits "traditional Hnchak" views on Armenian political developments. (Comment: While both the Ramkavars and Hnchaks retain organizational structures and a public profile, they appear to be fading as significant forces in the Diaspora, including in the U.S. End comment.)

SMALL BUT STRONG - THE ARMENIAN PROTESTANT COMMUNITY

¶19. (SBU) While constituting only roughly 10-15 percent of the Armenian community in the United States, the Armenian Protestant Community is generally considered the oldest and one of the most prominent parts of the U.S. Diaspora. This group traces its roots to the first major emigration of Armenians to the United States following the surge of American missionary activity in Ottoman Turkey in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Armenian Protestant Community's activities center around locally-based congregations that sponsor cultural, youth and charitable programs. Embassy sources agree that this community's strongest centers of support are in New Jersey and central and southern California. This group, while generally active in initiatives related to genocide awareness, recognition and study, does not subscribe to a specific political agenda on Armenia-related issues.

¶20. (SBU) The Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) claims organizational links to the majority of the Armenian Protestant churches and operates educational and humanitarian programs that benefit Armenian communities in the Republic of Armenia and in the Diaspora. Most experts agree that this group, due to its relatively long history in the U.S., has one of the strongest financial bases and the highest percentage of high profile professionals in the United States today. The Armenian Evangelical Union (AEU) represents a smaller portion of the Armenian Protestant Community. Similar to the organizations affiliated with the AMAA, AEU congregations sponsor locally based cultural and educational initiatives as well as humanitarian efforts in the Republic of Armenia.

ARMENIAN-AMERICAN CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS

¶21. (SBU) Armenian Catholics living in the United States represent a small portion of American-Armenian community (claiming membership of roughly 35,000). Following efforts to widen and strengthen its social and grassroots structure in the late 1990s, however, the group emerged as a well-organized group espousing conservative political and social values in line with the teachings of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate (based in Lebanon). While the Armenian-American Catholic community has ties to the American Conference of Catholic Bishops and other U.S.-based Catholic structures, it functions as an autonomous branch of Catholicism with 10 functioning parishes in the United States. These communities are concentrated most heavily in New York (home to the Exarchate, the U.S. community's leader), Los Angeles, Boston and New Jersey.

PROFESSIONAL AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS ON THE RISE

¶22. (SBU) A growing number of professional and cultural associations have changed the face of the Armenian-American community during the past two decades. While "independent" from the clusters of organizations mentioned above, many members of these associations likely belong to one or more of the cluster organizations. Groups like the Armenian Network, Armenian Bar Association, Armenian American International Women's Association and Armenian Professional and Student Association report increasing membership and are expanding their activities. These groups sponsor advocacy efforts in the U.S. as well as programs in Armenia ranging from technical assistance and exchange programs to humanitarian assistance and service trips.

HUMANITARIAN GROUPS AND PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS

¶23. (SBU) The United Armenian Fund, which sponsors humanitarian shipments to Armenia from the United States, is in a unique position among Armenian-American organizations. Largely funded by Kirk Kerkorian through his Lincy Foundation, the UAF is a joint effort of the Diocese, Prelacy, AGBU and other Diasporan organizations. Focused strictly on humanitarian projects, it enjoys virtually universal support in the community. The Hayastan-All-

Armenia-Fund, a public-private hybrid endeavor with significant political backing from the GOAM and Diaspora groups in the United States and France, has raised funds for humanitarian and infrastructure projects in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia since the early 1990's. The group was designed by advisors to then President Levon Ter-Petrossian as a mechanism to mobilize Diasporan financial support. While subject to some internal political intrigue and claims of financial mismanagement, the Hayastan-All-Armenia-Fund has maintained an extremely high profile among international Diaspora organizations and Armenian-Americans from the Los Angeles area figure prominently on the organization's governing board. The fund's annual telethon fundraiser is carried internationally via cable networks to cities with large Armenian communities. The organization's fundraising financed the two major road construction projects in Nagorno-Karabakh, the "East-West" and "North-South" highways.

¶24. (SBU) Individual Armenian-Americans continue to wield considerable influence in Armenia through private foundations and endowments such as the Lincy Foundation and the Cafesjian Family Foundation. Kirk Kerkorian's Lincy Foundation (named for his two daughters) has financed over USD 170 million in major infrastructure and small and medium-sized loans and grants in Armenia since 1999. The Lincy Foundation was a major contributor (USD 45 million) to multilateral housing reconstruction efforts in areas affected by the 1988 earthquake including the northern cities of Gyumri, Spitak and Vanadzor. The most recent tranche of Lincy Foundation projects included refurbishing Armenia's major highways linking the country to Georgia and Iran, a comprehensive program to restore urban roads and sidewalks in downtown Yerevan, renovation of major cultural institutions (including state museums and theaters in Yerevan) and the completion of a Soviet-era tunnel project connecting Armenia's northern regions to the Lake Sevan highway interchange. Lincy Foundation projects are managed jointly with the Government of Armenia, follow World Bank procurement procedures, and place the organization as one of the most significant foreign donors in the country.

¶25. (SBU) The Cafesjian Family Foundation, sponsored by Gerald Cafesjian (of Minnesota and Florida) has donated USD 40 million to a variety of NGOs and projects within Armenia over the past five years. The most visible of the Foundation's endeavors was the 2002 agreement with the GOAM for the logistical control and dual ownership of Yerevan's Cascade Monument and a large parcel of property adjacent to the structure. This agreement was a unique move for the GOAM in relinquishing majority control of one of the country's most important public spaces to an Armenian-American foundation. The foundation has refurbished much of the public space within the monument complex and has announced plans for the construction of a multi-million dollar art museum that will sit atop the monument. Cafesjian is reportedly already bringing together art works from Diasporan collectors that will supplement his personal collection once the museum opens. Cafesjian's projects make him and his organization a major player in Armenia's cultural and urban planning circles.

COMMENT

¶26. (SBU) As with any community in the United States whose membership is based around social or ethnic connections, mapping out Armenian-American Diaspora organizations reveals as many contradictions as it does watertight theories. The major categories outlined above are quickly changing as new generations of Armenian-Americans with different socio-economic realities take on leadership roles in these organizations and mold their agendas. Despite the contradictions and amorphous borders that divide these groups, engaging the U.S.-based Diaspora as a whole remains an important aspect of the GOAM's foreign policy, economic development and public relations strategies. The GOAM has increased its efforts to partner with the Armenian-American community through conferences, outreach products and by establishing a specialized office within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While most GOAM policymakers recognize the distinction between USG policy and Diaspora policy, they also appreciate the influence that the latter plays on the former. All indications point to a growing tendency on the part of the GOAM to capitalize on this dynamic as the U.S-Armenia bilateral relationship evolves.

ORDWAY